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STATE FOR EUR/SCE (PFEUFFER, DAS DICARLO, PDAS VOLKER)

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: MANAGING THE NAME ISSUE AND A NATO
INVITATION

REF: A. ATHENS 2089

[1](#)B. SKOPJE 841

Classified By: Ambassador Milovanovic, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Embassy Athens presents a clear assessment of the name issue and Macedonia's NATO membership prospects (ref A). We share Athens, preference for preparing joint recommendations to Washington, but in this case our two Missions differ substantially in their assumptions, analysis, recommendations and expected outcomes. Hence, we feel Washington decision makers will be best served if both sets of views are forwarded for consideration. We believe Skopje will not/not change its constitutional name under pressure, even at the risk of losing a NATO invitation, and that continued Greek pressure will reduce the GOM,s maneuver room to engage on broader confidence-building areas. The GOM will argue that, consistent with past enlargements, NATO membership should be performance-based, not subject to the insertion of additional bilateral criteria. The GOM name negotiator is actively engaged with Matthew Nimetz, and the GOM is committed to continued talks through the UN process, primarily with the aim of finding a mutually acceptable name for use in bilateral relations with Greece. GOM overtures to the GOG regarding face to face talks have met with no success thus far, but willingness remains in Skopje to pursue such talks. We believe that if the U.S. no longer holds Greece to abiding by the 1995 Interim Agreement, and/or the name issue is recast as a multilateral matter, Skopje would react negatively and emotionally and becoming less able to compromise.

[1](#)2. (C) At present, the problem as we see it is not the name. The problem is Greece,s tactical decision (hugely facilitated by the tone deaf, bull-headed actions of the VMRO and the PM personally in his early months in government) to attempt to renege on the 1995 Interim Agreement in the erroneous belief that Macedonians will be willing to sacrifice the name of their country in return for NATO membership. What is needed is to start genuinely to restore some confidence between the two countries and to provide sufficient face-saving for the GoG to allow them to accept a NATO invitation for Macedonia (if it meets NATO standards). Bilateral talks, focused on any of the plethora of less contentious issues of genuine importance to the two countries, offer a good approach. Macedonia would be open to such talks.

[1](#)3. (C) A key step to reaching our goal is to eliminate all hope that the U.S., EU members, or other third parties are going to attempt to broker or design agreements to stave off the inevitable, whether the inevitable is defined as almost universal recognition of Macedonia,s constitutional name or

a Greek veto to Macedonia,s NATO bid. So long as there is the belief that we will intervene, reluctance to get on with the job, talk directly to one another, and begin to rebuild relations will persist.

¶4. (C) We believe the key to managing the name issue and a NATO invitation for Macedonia is to ensure continued adherence by both sides to the 1995 Interim Accord, and in the meantime to engage in direct discussions on a broad range of issues of mutual concern, including addressing Greek fears of alleged irredentist tendencies in Macedonia and how to address them. Outside efforts to mediate or compel a solution would, we believe, entangle us in a process that would in the end simply produce frustration and resentment on both sides, and jeopardize our relations with one or both of the actors. END SUMMARY

TWO PERSPECTIVES

¶5. (C) Embassy Athens clearly and cogently presents its assessment of the situation, the key issues as seen from Greece, and recommendations for a way ahead (ref A). We have a different perspective, and believe that we can best help decision makers in Washington by providing both sets of analyses and recommendations rather than trying to craft a unified position.

SKOPJE: NO CONSTITUTIONAL NAME CHANGE, WHATEVER THE PRICE

¶6. (C) There is no likelihood that any Macedonian government, whatever its party stripes, would accept a change to Macedonia's constitutional name, either before April 2008 or subsequently. The prospect of Macedonia's NATO bid being vetoed by Greece, despite the commitments it undertook in the 1995 Interim Agreement, will not generate credible leverage

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in Skopje. Athens, aided and abetted by the bull-headed actions of VMRO and PM Gruevski in their early months in government, is miscalculating if it decides to renege on the 1995 Interim Agreement in the belief that Macedonians would be willing to sacrifice their country's name in return for NATO membership.

¶7. (C) The name issue is consistently at the top of the public's foreign policy concerns, and there is seamless solidarity on the issue across all parties and throughout the public. In fact, although the GOM is steadfast in supporting the 1995 Interim Agreement under which it accepts to enter international organizations as Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, most Macedonians, according to one recent television survey, would rather forgo NATO membership than enter as FYROM, despite the 90 percent public support for NATO membership as a whole.

NATO MEMBERSHIP -- PERFORMANCE MATTERS. PERIOD.

¶8. (C) The GOM believes, consistent with previous enlargements, that it should receive a NATO membership invitation if it meets the MAP criteria. It sees the name issue as an additional prerequisite not required of any other NATO aspirant. Aside from Macedonia,s own response to the addition of name-related criteria to the menu of NATO requirements, we believe that accepting to insert a bilateral conditionality not tied to performance into the multilateral MAP NATO process would constitute an unhelpful precedent for future candidacies. Future NATO aspirants might find themselves blocked in the same manner) on non-MAP grounds-- by one NATO member.

COMMITTED TO CONTINUE ENGAGEMENT

¶9. (C) The GOM remains actively engaged in the UN process to find a mutually acceptable name that will replace FYROM in bilateral dealings with Athens. Skopje believes that, with 118 countries already recognizing its constitutional name,

the permanent name is already an objective fact, and their argument that the name issue is a bilateral problem between Athens and Skopje is thereby reinforced. The fact that the GOM has kept Ambassador Dimitrov, probably the country's most capable diplomat, as the name negotiator is a positive sign that the government is committed to finding a solution under the dual-name rubric, given that changing the constitutional name is not an option from the GoM's perspective. Additionally, the fact that Dimitrov has met several times with Nimetz recently despite multiple other taskings by the Prime Minister, is a further indication that the GOM is committed to action in the UN Channel.

THE MORE ONE PUSHES, THE MORE THE OTHER DIGS IN

¶10. (C) The increasingly shrill public campaign of menacing public statements by Greek leaders and spokespersons (and the recent name-related harassment of the Macedonian team in Thessaloniki that led to the withdrawal of the 130-strong delegation of Macedonian youth sportsmen from a regional games competition), is steadily reducing whatever slight wiggle room there exists for Skopje to act constructively, whether on the name or on the broader issue of face to face talks to build confidence and calm tempers.

¶11. (C) So far, the GOM has exercised restraint, either declining to respond to Greek statements or "interpreting" them in such a way as to leave room for a response that does not lead to escalated rhetoric. This restraint cannot be taken for granted, since every indication of a failure to counter Athens's verbal blows, at least rhetorically, is seen as a political liability for the government. If the gloves eventually come off, to use a metaphor drawn from PM Gruevski's boxing past, the rhetorical temperature will rise and the government's attitude will become even more rigid.

ACCOMMODATING TO THE INEVITABLE

¶12. (C) Macedonia believes that the name issue will resolve itself over time as additional countries recognize Macedonia's constitutional name. The United States cannot &fix8 the name problem. In fact, the problem is &fixing8 itself with time, but the solution likely to emerge through facts on the ground is one that) very understandably * is distasteful to the GoG. As Embassy Athens has noted, there has been a tendency of the GoG to paint itself into a corner (a reflex well-known in Skopje too, though not on the name issue) instead of preparing the public for an inevitable policy shift.

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MANAGING THE TRANSITION WITHOUT DIRECT INVOLVEMENT

¶13. (C) We agree that the Greek side, especially with its slimmer parliamentary majority, needs help to make that transition. We do not believe, however, that injecting ourselves directly or indirectly into mediation or facilitation of talks that can easily take place without outside assistance will improve outcomes. It will, instead, prolong the incorrect Greek assumption that their problem is our problem. It would also give the Macedonians the wrong impression) which they do not yet have - that their problem is our problem. The key will be to avoid giving either side the false hope that the U.S., EU members, or other third parties are going to help broker or deliver an agreement that will prevent an inevitable outcome, whether that outcome is almost universal recognition of Macedonia's constitutional name or a Greek veto of Macedonia's NATO bid.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

¶14. (C) What, then, can be done to square the circle and help ensure Macedonia receives a NATO invitation if it fulfills the criteria, while reassuring Greece that Macedonia has no irredentist intentions toward its vastly more powerful and

influential southern neighbor? Two things.

¶15. (C) First, we should ensure both sides re-state that until they agree on some alternative solution, they agree to adhere to the 1995 Interim Agreement. We should be sure that both sides understand that, if they fail to do so, they cannot expect us to support them in arriving at alternate outcomes. In the meantime, we would lean on Skopje to avoid reacting to provocations, to ensure they resist the urge to provoke the other side. If presented with specific information regarding offending materials, we would also ensure they took concrete, measurable steps to explain the facts and as appropriate to address Greek concerns about allegedly irredentist textbooks, medals, maps, etc.

¶16. (C) Second, we believe Macedonia is ready, even without any third-party mediation, to meet directly with Greek counterparts to begin discussions on a broader range of issues in order to: 1) de-escalate tensions, and 2) begin to build confidence through small practical achievements. If necessary, we could help facilitate a process and place where the Macedonians and Greece would talk directly to each other, not through us or with us, about a range of issues (not only the name), to include Greece's concerns about alleged Macedonian irredentism and how to address those concerns outside of the name discussions. Certainly both Embassy Skopje and Embassy Athens, in close coordination with each other, should be prepared to be behind-the-scenes coaches and mentors to their host governments to help keep them on track.

For example, lowering Athens, rhetoric and keeping Skopje, s down will be important, as will ensuring that both sides understand that if public reiterations of the 1995 Agreement or elements of the Macedonian constitution become part of building confidence, such statements will need to be rigorously evenhanded) involving equal pledges on both sides. The agenda for such discussions should be broad enough to cover areas where they already share strong and often win-win mutual interests, including: border control regimes, trade ties, investment, energy cooperation, roads, and tourism, so that they begin to build more of an interest in partnership than in name-calling.

MILOVANOVIC